

Make It Count

by WildArm

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"Bravery is being the only one who knows you're afraid." â€" Franklin P. Jones

Make it count.

That's what Jorge told me aboard the Covenant Supercarrier before he threw me out of it. He seemed so sure of himself in that moment, so positive that what he was doing was the utter most important thing in the entire universe. He thought he gave his life for Reach, thought he saved it by staying behind to set off the SFTE, thought that the nightmare was over so he could die in peace. I wonderâ€¦did he make it count?

Looking at his dog tags dangling in my hand, I bring my gaze to my side and see Emile's corpse slumped by the railing, a huge gash protruding from his torso. Emile bravely manned the Mass Driver with no support to aid in the delivery of the package Dr. Halsey gave to me, an A.I. who specifically "chose me" to see to it that it was delivered unharmed. When evacuation became possible for me, Emile decided to stay behind so I could leave Reach. Always a fighter to his last breath, Emile was ambushed by Sangheili who had ambushed and killed him, but not before he killed both of his assailants in turn.

I'm ready! How 'bout you? Those were his last words before he disappeared from view. I swore that I heard his breathing through my

COM Link before I made my own way to the Mass Driver, but he was already gone by that point, his final trophies sprawled across the floor before him. He looked triumphant to me thenâ€”and still does nowâ€”looking so serene, so peaceful, yet so victorious. I let Captain Keyes and the others go so I could defend the Pillar of Autumn as it made its ascent.

And now the Pillar of Autumn is nothing but a speck as it ascends into slip space. It's funny how an A.I. in a tube so small could bear such an importance to the survival of humanity, and I was all but happy to be a part of it in some way, even though I would never see the fruit of my deeds.

I give Emile one final nod and place Jorge's dog tags in my hip pack, taking out my DMR in the process.

Several hours have passed since then, hours since I've seen a living Marine or Spartan. As I watched one final Pelican make its way into the depths of space from the run-down base station I was currently in, I looked up and thought with hope: there'll be another time.

Banshees flew overhead, circled around me, and then took off; they were no doubt about to signal other Covenant carriers to descend upon my location.

Within minutes, a Covenant drop ship made its way to the base. I watched as Grunts, Jackals, and Elites descended from the ship, all of them closing in on my position. It was all or nothing now. No running, no surrender.

I grabbed my sniper rifle and aimed down my sight at two Elites trying to flank my left. Four shotsâ€”all aimed at the headâ€”stopped them dead in their tracks. Grunts and Jackals came in waves, all of them cut down by my DMR. I turned my gaze to an Elite who managed to break through my flank, an Energy Sword at the ready. It swung once and I barely managed to dodge the attack before I grabbed the Elite's arm and twist it back, the Energy Sword protruding through its chest, the Elite wailing in pain before it fell lifeless to the ground.

I used the last of the sniper rifle ammo on Elites that were running straight for me. Before the last Elite went down, one well-placed shot from a Plasma Rifle found my right shoulder, my armor sparking and my shields flashing. I fell to one knee, shaking my head to compose myself.

I was someone's son once. I was a brother once. Before I was a number or a letter, I was a simple boy who cherished playing in the dirt or chasing after butterflies or playing with my older brother and father. I had friends once; I can still see their smiling faces: some missing the fronts of their teeth, some wearing braces, some with scraped knees or scabbed elbows, all of them grown now with families of their own.

_Unless they were dead. Unless they were all like the people on Reach. _

I regain my composure, my shields functioning once again. A Grunt was bold enough to charge me before I brought down the butt of my sniper rifle on its cranium, splitting it open, the creature falling to the

floor with a comical cry.

I discard my sniper rifle just in time to relinquish my magnum from its holster and blow a hole in the chest of a Jackal who was poised to strike.

Loud grunts and shrieks behind me were growing increasingly louder. I turn just in time to see the earth in front of me erupt, sending me hurtling through the air, the breath escaping my body as gravity brought me back down.

_I can still hear my mother's sweet voice, can still see those dark chocolate eyes of hers smile whenever she watched me. "Alexander, you know Mommy loves you, don't you?" she would say after one of my many childish acts. She used to kiss the tip of my nose ever softly, used to sing me to sleep, used to brush my hair with her soft, delicate hands if we were going to visit relatives. _

_I used to dream of her some times; it would always end with her telling me to "come home" to her and to my family. I used to tell her that I was doing a good thing and that I was happy where I wasâ€|but was I really? They _stole_ me, didn't they? Said that I had potential, that I had that "extra special something" they needed._

I roll back to my feet before the huge arm of a Hunter cracks the earth where I was just laying. I swing my magnum to the exposed orange flesh in its back and empty the clip, the Hunter reeling and falling to the ground, lifeless. Its partner smacked me with the back of its shielded arm and sent me back to the ground, my shields flickering, blood escaping my suit where I was sure I was now bleeding internally.

"_Mom! Dad! Jacob!" I tried to scream back then before being silenced with a rag in my mouth. I fought and fought to no avail as I watched my parents enjoying their outing together, smiling and laughing. I looked for my brother Jacob in the mess of children that were in the park that day, hoping that he would sense I was in danger and come to my rescue, but the rescue never came._

_From that day onward, I was no longer Alexander Lockeâ€|I was Alexander-B312. I was a Spartan. The ones I fought beside were my family now. But I was never oblivious to what we Spartan III's represented: cannon fodder. We were inferior to the Spartan II models, took less time to mass produce, were trained to be in companies of three hundred or more at a time. Sometimes, the casualty rate for some missions was one hundred percent. _

_I was fortunate to be one of the Spartan III's they considered to be an asset to them: I was used for infiltration, assassinations, recon, and suppression. I was always on my own, always fought for myself and by myself, never having to worry about the safety of another squad mate. _

That all changed when I joined Noble. I had a new family, new sister and brothers to fight beside. I was no longer the Lone Wolf described on pieces of paper filled with black ink; I was now Noble Six.

My breathing has become ragged, fatigue settling in, my consciousness starting to wane. The Hunter was once more upon me, charging its assault cannon. Hunters were known to travel and fight in pairsâ€|or

"bond brothers"â€"similar to how Noble Team fought together. When one of the pair went down, the other would attack in a frenzy brought on by anger and sadness and grief. It was almost a pitiful thing to witness.

Almost.

I swing my DMR to my side and fire careful shots at the assault cannon, the Hunter losing focus and the plasma shot missing me entirely. It looked to the sky and roared loudly, gripping the ground with both claws before charging me head-on. I fire at the soft exposed flesh but the Hunter continues its charge. I discard my DMR and stand my ground, ready to absorb the blow. As he comes to me full force, barreling into me, my shields go down once again and I jump on its back, the Hunter squealing wildly. I remove the knife from my shoulder strap and plunge it into the small of its back several times before its elbow finds my helmet, the visor cracking, my view obscured.

The Hunter falls to the ground and I remove my helmet, spitting out the blood that formed in my mouth. I see my DMR and magnum a few yards away with an Elite advancing. I scramble forth and fire at the Elite with my DMR, the noble creature collapsing to the ground.

The heat of an Energy Sword behind me caused me to escape a swipe in time to land an elbow on my assailant, using the magnum in my right hand to finish the job.

They were beginning to swarm now.

Plasma fire hit me from the front and to the right. I aim my DMR in front of me whilst blindly firing my magnum to the right, both of the Elites grunting before finally dying. Another Elite with an Energy Sword charged and barreled into me, knocking me to the ground. It tried to jump on top of me, but a swift boot to the stomach pushed it aside in time to dodge another Elite with an Energy Sword, an elbow smashing into its mouth.

_Where was my family now? I wondered. Were they still looking for me? Did they post pictures of my on trees and store windows and milk cartons? Did they give up hope and move on with their lives? Was I an uncle? Did my nieces or nephews know I existed or was I just some family ghost that everyone wanted to forget? _

_Did my mother ever look out into the evening sky wondering where her boy was and hoped that he would come home? Would she be proud of me if she saw me now? Did she still have those beautiful dark chocolate eyes that smiled whenever she looked at me or were they now dulled by the pain of losing one of her children? â€|Did she still love me?

_

I pull out Jorge's dog tags in time to dodge the attack of the Elite I kicked, delivering another elbow to it, the creature stumbling to the ground. By then, the Elite in the decorated red armor was upon me.

The Elite winded its massive arm back, claw clenched tightly around its Energy Sword. There was anger in its face, rage that showed its utmost disgust for the human race, rage that festered upon seeing all of its comrades I have killed. But behind the anger, rage, sadness,

and sorrowâ€”behind all the masks of emotion a soldier wearsâ€”there was something else that glistened in its eyes:

Respect.

Keyes, I thought, the Elite thrust coming down, _whatever we did hereâ€”Noble Team, the UNSC, every civilian, Spartan, and soldierâ€”don't let our sacrifice be in vain. Never forget what we fought and died for. Remember Reach. _

The Elite Energy Sword found my torso, ripping through my armor, the shock and pain unbearable. I opened my mouth to scream, but all that came out was a fountain of blood that flowered down my chin, the strong smell of burning flesh and iron filling my nostrils.

The Elite grunted once, turning the Energy Sword. I gripped Jorge's dog tags in my left hand and grabbed the Elite's arm with my right. "Spartansâ€”never dieâ€” We live foreverâ€”" I managed to say, chocking on my blood, grabbing it ever harder.

We looked at one another for a moment before it turned its gaze to Jorge's dog tags in my hand. It turned its head as if it understood what I meant. I could feel the darkness settling in, my grip on the Elite loosening.

_Keyesâ€”make it count. _

Fin

A/N: Thank you for taking the time to read this; I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. Ever since I completed Reach and saw that final scene with Six, I imagined what his life could have been like before he was taken into the Spartan III program and what his thoughts were at the game's finale.

Spartans are known to be fierce, fearless warriors. Making Six bear some human qualities was something I enjoyed doing, and I hope it was something you, the reader, enjoyed as well.

Any review would be greatly appreciated. God bless.

- Wild.

End
file.